

Too Many Miles

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It was a typical hot summer in Alabama, with clear skies on most days and a combination of heat and humidity even a cool breeze couldn't cut. My wife was flying into the airport at Fort Lauderdale, Fla., for the weekend, but her flight didn't get in until 10 p.m. on a Thursday night. I had to work during the week, but my commander said I could take the trip as long as I requested a weekend pass.

My command approved the pass, so I got on the Internet the day before the trip to find the best route to Fort Lauderdale and check the weather along the way. The weather looked good, so I selected a route and marked it on a road map to carry with me in the car. The boss released me early and I went home, packed a small backpack with my shaving kit and a change of clothes and went out for dinner. I called my wife a little later to verify her arrival time and, after talking for a couple of minutes, we said goodbye and I went to sleep.

The alarm went off the next morning at 6 a.m. I showered, got dressed and checked the car one last time before leaving on the 10-hour drive. The fluid levels were OK and my tires were in good condition and properly inflated. I pulled out of the driveway at 7 a.m.

There was very little traffic, which made the drive a breeze. I stopped for lunch about 11 a.m. and got back on the road about 45 minutes later. Somewhere between noon and 1 p.m., my lunch hit me and I started feeling sleepy. Before I realized it or could even stop myself, I fell asleep as I was driving. I remember waking up and, thankfully, the car was still on the highway. I think I was asleep for only a few seconds, but a few seconds is all it takes to get killed or kill someone else on the highway.

I was surprised I'd fallen asleep but grateful I didn't get into accident. I stopped on the roadside and rested for a few minutes. Despite my close call, I made it to the airport safely, picked up my wife and spent the weekend in Florida. I planned for rest stops during the drive back and made sure we switched drivers when either of us got tired.

So what did I learn from this near miss? Whenever I'm planning a trip now, I always allow for rest stops. In addition, I no longer eat large meals if I'm driving by myself. Most importantly, I learned that assessing the risks before you take off on a long drive is as important as when you take off on a long mission. You might not come back from either one if you don't.

FYI---Want to get a quick online update of your travel weather? Check out The Weather Channel at <http://www.weather.com/>, or Accuweather at <http://home.accuweather.com/> to see if Mother Nature has any nasty plans for your trip.



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CW3 Albert Fraticelli took his trip just after ASMIS-1 was released and before it became commonly used. It was later updated to become ASMIS-2 and, most recently, has become the Travel Risk Planning System, better known as "TRiPS," and is now accepted and used by all U.S. military services. The program provides users with a basic map and driving directions, partially completed leave forms and the ability to review construction zone information along their route. The system provides supervisors with an overview of their peoples' plans and a starting point for a discussion with them. You'll be asked a series of questions that will be used to assess the risk level of your trip and provide suggestions, where needed, to lower that level. For example, this editor will be driving 824 miles to visit friends in Texas, but I only get five to six hours of sleep per night. To lower the "Moderate" risk level provided on my assessment, I opted to take our family car so my wife and I could change drivers. TRiPS also recommended that I plan my trip not to exceed nine hours of driving time in any 17-hour period. That lowered the risk assessment to "Low" and improves my chances of having a safer, more enjoyable trip. You, too, can take advantage of TRiPS online at https://crcapps2.crc.army.mil/ako_auth/TRiPS/default.aspx. Taking all the benefits into consideration and the five minutes of your time it takes to complete, why not use TRiPS to ensure your trip will be one the whole family will remember for the right reasons?